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All subscriptions, communications, notices, advertisements, etc. should be addressed to Miss DORA BAKER,
"Anthroposophic News Sheet" Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland.

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL BEING

Lecture by Dr. RUDOLF STEINER delivered at The Hague on
the 31st of October 1922.

(CONCLUSION)

In that world we see ourselves surrounded by spiritual beings, just as here in the physical world we see ourselves surrounded by physical beings. Our memory, or our power of recollection, is that which leads us back a little way in the physical world, yet it does not lead us out of it. We have abstract thoughts. They bring into our soul experiences which we had years ago. But through the processes which I described to you just now, we do not have before us our ordinary experiences upon the earth, but instead of these we have before us an image. It is however an image which corresponds to a reality, we have before us our pre-earthly existence in its true essence and activity.

I was only able to describe to you the paths which the soul must tread if we wish to advance from the fleeting experience of thoughts, feelings and impulses of the will to the creative forces working upon the human body, to that which existed before we became connected with the human body, to something pertaining to a spiritual world, to something which does not come into being with the body, but which calls the body into being, rendering possible its existence as a human body. Through such an exact clairvoyance, we penetrate by degrees from a physical existence into a super-physical, into a spiritual existence. We do not speculate, we do not develop philosophic abstract concepts, but through these processes we seek experiences connected with the spiritual world and a knowledge of man's spiritual being.

In this way we can, as it were discover on the one hand the human soul's eternal being. On the other hand, we are thus able to develop in a modern form and through an exact clairvoyance what men of older epochs, who possessed a more dreamlike clairvoyance,

*) From stenographic notes unrevised by the lecturer.

developed in so-called asceticism.

Let us bear in mind again that that which asceticism strove after in a rather material form must now be reached in a more spiritual way. The ascetic tried to paralyse and leaden his body; it even became ill to some extent. As a modern man, I shall certainly not speak in favour of anything that renders the body ill and weak, nor of anything that deadens its vitality, yet in those older times people were well aware of what they were doing, when they systematically deadened their body. What takes place in that case? In the same degree in which these men systematically deadened their body, they awakened the soul within them. Through this deadening process their body became, I might say, more and more transparent. When these ascetics of past times had leadened their bodily instincts, they found that the soul became more and more alive. This enabled them to gain knowledge of something that the human being ordinarily experiences in an unconscious way, while he is asleep.

I have thus told you how we can penetrate consciously, that is to say, clairvoyantly, into that which otherwise lies concealed in the darkness of the human organism; I have described to you two processes which enable us to gain this knowledge: on the one hand, the Yoga philosophy, and on the other hand, modern meditation. I have told you that at first we are filled with doubt concerning the destiny of the human spirit, for we do not perceive the soul-spiritual activity in the depths of the human organism, because when we awake, we enter, as it were, into the darkness of our human body, and do not even know what our soul is doing when we move our hand.

The ancient Yogi gained knowledge of his inner life by using his breathing, as it were, as a sense of touch. The modern clairvoyant illuminates his inner being with his exact thinking, which has become clairvoyant, and thus he penetrates consciously into the darkness of his body. This gives him certainty concerning the destiny of the human spirit, instead of that uncertainty which arises in ordinary life, for when we awake, we dive unconsciously into the darkness of our body. But on the other hand this doubt concerning our spiritual being arises because we see our soul-spiritual essence fading away into twilight when we fall asleep, and it only shines forth again when we awake. We must ask ourselves: Is it possible that our soul has an independent existence, seeing that the bodily requirements are thus able to extinguish it every day?

Now the ascetic of past times was able to reach the following result: By a systematic deadening of his body, by lowering its vital forces, indeed by rendering it ill and weak, his soul acquired a stronger consciousness filling the life between the moments of falling asleep and of waking up. While he was asleep, his consciousness no longer sank down completely into unconsciousness. Dreams rose to the surface, dreams which enabled him to experience

realities, and more and more precise experiences. To the same degree to which his body was deadened, a soul-life shone forth resembling the sleeping life of the soul, but now it was a conscious life and consequently opposed to the ordinary sleeping life of the soul.

The ascetics therefore had to admit the following: "You can live with your soul in a way in which you otherwise would only live when you are asleep. The soul can therefore live its own life, even when it is outside the body". By lowering the body's life, the ascetic of olden times withdrew this independent soul life out of the body, and this gave him the knowledge- though it was a dreamy knowledge in those olden times - which may be expressed as follows: When the body completely falls away from you, when you reach the highest degree of deadened bodily obtuseness, which asceticism can only give you to a slight degree, when you discard your body through death, then that highest moment arises which you have already learned to know in a weaker form during your life on earth. Thus the old forms of ascetic practices gave the clairvoyants of the past a knowledge which they could then impart to others, namely that even in the face of death the soul has an eternal life in the spirit. Whereas the Yoga exercises of the past, and also the modern meditation exercises, enabled the Yogi on the one hand and modern men on the other, to look into their pre-earthly existence, thus revealing one aspect of eternity of the human soul, the clairvoyant of ancient times looked beyond the portal of death and by deadening and blunting the body he was able to see how the soul overcomes death.

Asceticism is a path which cannot be followed by modern men, for one result was evident to the ascetic of the past: His body, which he had blunted and deadened by his ascetic practices, (that is to say, for the attainment of higher knowledge) was not able to face the requirements of ordinary life. In the past people had confidence in those hermits and sought from them a knowledge which was not accessible to ordinary men. To-day it would not be possible to have this confidence. The ascetic exercises can be modified to suit modern life and the consciousness of the modern age in the same way in which the Yoga exercises can be modified. The ascetic of the past lowered his body's forces in order to awaken his soul-life, the life which the soul lived in eternity before birth; he weakened his body so as to recognise his soul-life, which remained unchanged in the face of the weakened body, for the soul-life was then relatively stronger. But a modern man must tread the opposite path: He leaves the body unchanged and strengthens his soul-life. This again must be attained with the help of exercises.

Let me deal more in particular with some of the things described in detail in the above-mentioned books. One exercise is specially effective: In our ordinary life, we allow our thoughts and our soul-life to pass by passively, following that which takes place in the world outside. What existed before a certain moment of time, we think of before, and what existed later, we think of later.

Those who wish to strengthen their soul-life systematically, must work day by day, if only for a few minutes. But if they wish to obtain real results, they must work as diligently as scientists in a laboratory, or in an astronomical observatory, or in a clinic. Yet they must work with inner processes. Let us say, for example, that they let the day's events pass before them in inverted order, for instance at 7 p.m. First of all they observe what occurred between 7 and 6 p.m., then between 6 and 5 p.m. and so they follow the day's events backwards. It is best to follow the day's events in every detail. Let us suppose that we were walking up a staircase. First we stood on the lowest step, then on the next, and so forth. Now in that retrospective reconstruction, which is not only meant to be a recollection but a retrospective reconstruction, we first of all stand on the top of the staircase and imagine ourselves descending to the last but one, and so on until we reach the lowest step. We pass through the whole process backwards. And it is the same with other things. We may do this, for instance, with certain years of our life, by going back from the 18th to the 15th year, but if possible by including every detail. This is more difficult than one generally thinks. With this we actively oppose within us the external course of things. We do not merely surrender passively to them, but we face them, we confront them. This tears our thoughts away from the sequence of external events in the physical world, and in so doing we grow accustomed to quite a new inner way of handling our thoughts. Our thinking activity must grow stronger, more independent, by tearing itself away from the external world.

Other exercises can be made in a similar way. You know that life constantly changes. Those who are quite honest in their self-contemplation, will have to admit that at the present moment they are different from what they were, for instance, ten or twenty years ago. What made them change? We have only surrendered to life passively, we have become what life has made of us, what heredity, education, etc. have made of us.

Those who wish to become spiritual investigators in the above-mentioned meaning, must take control of their life, and just as they strengthened their thoughts through meditation, they must now set to work with the greatest inner energy to strengthen their will.

At a certain moment of their life they must, for instance say: "For the next three years, you set yourself the task of equipping your soul-life, as it were, with inner habits. What you generally become through life, what life makes out of you, this must now be taken in hand by *y o u*. Life changes you with every year that passes. Now you yourself take in hand this force of life's stream. You consciously begin to transform certain habits within you, which life itself would otherwise have changed."

It will be seen that particularly small habits that have intruded themselves upon life, can work wonders in the direction

of an inner self-training if we change them through ever more conscious soul-exercises. For example, those who have had a special handwriting up to a certain moment of their life, and now begin to change this handwriting through a conscious effort, will become, as it were, their own inner guides. Similarly there are countless more or less marked habits which can be controlled. Thus they will more and more learn to guide their will. If they continue the will-exercises, as explained in my book "KNOWLEDGE OF THE HIGHER WORLDS" and in other writings, they will develop something which can be attained through retrospective thoughts and through this form of self-discipline - and this is self-control, which strengthens the soul's life.

Just as the ascetic of past times weakened his body, leaving his soul-life, which became relatively stronger, unchanged, so a modern spiritual training leaves the body as it is, but strengthens the soul-life, as already described. Then we can observe something strange in our human existence, something that I can only describe to you by using a simile.

Take the human eye. What enables it to see? The fact that the eye itself is transparent; it allows, as it were, the light to pass through it unselfishly. As soon as the eye has, for instance, a cataract and asserts its own physical substance, it loses the sense of sight. The eye forgets itself completely, as it were, and this enables it to be the servant of the human organism in regard to sight. By not asserting its own physical substance, it becomes an organ of sense for the external physical world.

If we strengthen our soul-life through self-control, in the manner described, it will finally rule over the human organism, so that it becomes illuminated from within, not only through the exercises of meditation, but through the fact that the body itself becomes transparent in relation to the soul-spiritual world, even as the eye is transparent for the physical light. Even as we do not see the eye, but the objects outside, so we learn to know the spiritual world through a kind of transparent soul-medium, through our body, which is not physically, but soul-spiritually transparent, for it no longer sends out of itself desires, instincts and passions. The moment we use our body as a higher spiritual sense-organ, we learn to know the spiritual world. In this way we can say to ourselves: "We look into a spiritual world through our bodily organism. This has become our soul's eye, it has become a spiritual eye."

Like the ascetics of olden times, we now attain knowledge of the human soul's eternal being, extending beyond death. And through the fact that we learn to live with the spiritual world round about us, when our own body has become an unselfish organ of sense, light is shed over a soul-life outside the physical body. Now we are able to leave the body uninfluenced by the soul's life, as it is during sleep, for we have strengthened our soul-life. We can separate the soul from the physical and etheric body, as it is separated from them during sleep. We experience a condition resembling sleep, yet opposed to sleep. We learn to know that our soul-life is not extinguished

355.
when we are asleep, but that it was only too weak to develop a state of consciousness from the moment of falling asleep to the moment of waking up.

Through a strengthened soul-life we send light into a sleep which we produce artificially, we illuminate this sleep. We know that we can unfold a soul-spiritual life even without the body. When the image of death confronts us, the image of life after death, we know that the soul is endowed with everlasting life beyond the portal of death, that is to say, it has an eternal life even in the pre-natal direction, opposed to that which I have already described to you.

Through our meditations we learn to know our soul-life in its pre-earthly existence. This is one aspect of eternity. Through a training of our will, through self-control and a strengthening of our soul-life, we learn to know an eternal life that goes beyond death.

You see, these things can be reached. We try to obtain these results, not by following the path of the spiritist, whose experiments resemble those of the world outside, no! we try to attain these results by unfolding the human soul-life, so that organs develop within it which enable us to look into the spiritual world.

The anthroposophical spiritual science does not wish to sin against the spirit of exact modern science; but modern science cannot yet investigate with exactness an external world, for it is not accessible to it, just as colours are not accessible to a blind person. First of all it is necessary to develop the spiritual eye, the spiritual power of vision. This takes place through meditation and through a training of the will.

Through meditation and a training of the will, we deal with our own self in the same way in which a scientist ordinarily deals with the external world. This enables us to say that we carry the spirit of a modern scientific culture into spheres where a scientific activity changes into a religious experience, and where we finally recognise man's spiritual being. This spiritual being of man is connected with a spiritual world, just as the physical human being is connected here on earth with a physical world.

Next Friday I shall describe to you how we can find our way about in this spiritual world, how we can discover the spiritual being of the universe. The supersensible methods of knowledge throw light upon the spiritual being of man, and they also illuminate the spiritual being of the universe. This will show us that the intimate living connection of man's spiritual being with the spiritual being of the universe produces, through a genuine modern clairvoyance, a deepening of religious life, and the old, deeply religious life which men have lost through modern science, can thus be won again, so that the deepest religious feelings can now be connected with

the strictest scientific attitude.

This is, after all, the aim of modern civilisation. It has met with such a hard destiny, because it has lost the spirit. Perhaps next time, when we shall contemplate the spiritual being of the universe, this evil destiny of our time can be explained. To-day I only wished to show you, as an introduction, how we may recognise our own spiritual being, so that we may then discover the spiritual being of the universe and connect ourselves with it through religious feelings and in luminous clarity.

From the explanations which I have taken the liberty of giving you to-day, it will perhaps be evident that what is meant here as exact clairvoyance, leading us to a knowledge of the eternal being of human nature, should not contradict the spirit of modern science. Anthroposophy above all should and can recognise the triumphs of natural science in our modern age. Yet something must be sought which modern science, in the form of external observations and experiments, cannot give us. Anthroposophy, as a science of the spirit, does not deny nor criticize the justification of modern science. Such an attitude towards science would be just as much a criticism than facing a human being and saying that we can see his physiognomy, his gestures, the forms of his body, the complexion of his skin, and that a soul-spiritual being lives behind that which our external senses thus reveal to us. We have before us the whole human being only if we perceive the soul, speaking and looking out of his gestures, his complexion, and his whole form.

Similarly, if we gain knowledge of the external world through a science based on external observations and experiments, we have before us, as it were, the world's external gestures, the world's external physiognomy; but we do not have before us its soul, nor its spirit. If we only contemplate a man's exterior, we can only gain an incomplete knowledge of him and we cannot have a real connection with him. A true connection with a human being can only be gained if his soul and spirit speak to us through his complexion, through his features, through everything that constitutes his exterior. In the same way, the world as a whole and man's true being can only be recognised if we perceive the soul of the universe behind everything that a genuine natural science transmits to us as the world's physiognomy and gestures (and it can do this, if it remains within its limits). If we progress to an exact clairvoyance, we perceive through these external physical gestures the existence of the soul of the universe, and are thus able to recognise behind man's external physical gestures the spirit of the universe, and at the same time, the spirit of man.

Anthroposophy consequently does not oppose science, but on the contrary, it seeks to bring it into spheres, where our modern science cannot penetrate. Anthroposophy does not strive after the spirit by taking up a combative attitude, but by recognising

the merits of natural science, indeed, by raising it to a higher standard in regard to that which we learn to know as soul and spirit in the spheres of materialism and physiology. Anthroposophy seeks to become the soul and spirit of modern science, for modern science needs this soul and spirit, in addition to its scientific attitude, so that the human soul may acquire warmth and inner light, satisfying its true religious needs.

This alone enables modern men to acquire a new life out of the soul and spirit, so that they can face a more hopeful future than that which would result through a more materialistic world conception

AN ALLEGORY.

By Albert S t e f f e n .

After wandering about for a long time, a poet reached an abandoned and completely empty building. The windows were broken, the doors stood open. He entered and stood in a round room surrounded by columns, facing a table of sandstone. Upon it lay a bundle of plants tied together with bast. It was the only thing which the owner had left behind, and he evidently intended that it should be seen at once. But nobody had yet thought it worth while to notice it

The poet began to untie the parcel, for he thought that it might contain seeds. He meant to plant the seedlings or bulbs in the garden, so that when the owner returned, he might at least find a few flower-beds in return for his lost household goods. So he carefully took off the wrappings, which became more and more frail and delicate and finally he peeled out of a layer of pale flower-leaves an ivory statuette, about a yard long, which immediately fell apart into two length-halves, as he touched it.

The two halves were not quite equal, for the left part had an angel's wing pointing earthward, whereas the right part had a decorative pinnacle of a little tabernacle, pointing to the sky.

When he tried to join the two sections, the figure slid out of his hands and vanished among the pages of a folio, for the leaves in which they were wrapped had unexpectedly changed into one. He turned over the pages of the book, from the last page to the first, but he could find in it no divine forms, only human ones, which may also be found in other stories, though they were still living beings instead of lifeless letters, so that they were interesting enough.

On the title page, lying face downwards, stood a sarcophagus, but a sleeping form and not a corpse lay in it. It slept there in a white pilgrim's garment, flowing down in severe folds and